

The University of Ottawa

Agricultural Production and Labour in the Women's
Prison Farm of El Salvador

by

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Major Research Paper submitted

In partial fulfillment of the

Master of Arts degree in

Globalization and International Development

School of International Development and Global Studies

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Ottawa

OTTAWA, ONTARIO

AUGUST, 2014

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank several people who contributed to making this research paper possible. First, I would like to thank Professor Deborah Sick, whose understanding of the region and her initial interest and belief in the topic allowed me to strive forward with the research. Professor Sick's recommendations along the way were an integral element of the final work. Second, I thank three individuals who helped to "get my foot in the door", Sonya Aguirre, Tania Cedillos, and Douglas Romero, all government officials in El Salvador with a vision of a better future for the country, and finally, to all the personnel of the Izalco Prison Farm, particularly the work of the Administrator of the farm and the "technicians", their names left out for practical reasons, but whose work and insight contributed immensely to the findings of the research. A special mention goes to all the prisoners in the Salvadoran prison farms, especially those in the Izalco women's penitentiary; may they get to find a better life outside the prison system.

Abstract

El Salvador has one of the highest murder rates in the world. The high levels of crime combined with ineffective security sector policies, limited infrastructure and budget constraints have resulted in extremely overcrowded prisons. Prisons in turn have become a visual point of reference for the state of insecurity in the country. In response, and among a series of recent government security reforms addressing the overrun penitentiary system, a number of prison farms have been established in the country. This paper provides an initial exploration of the recently established prison-based agriculture program at the Izalco Prison Farm that introduces women inmates to work in agricultural activities including horticulture, livestock production and food processing with the official goal of providing skills that will help them reintegrate back into society. The goal of this paper is to provide insight into the agricultural production and labour practices of the Izalco Prison Farm. Information collected includes descriptions of the operations of the penitentiary and how the work is linked to the official goals of the program, including a number of different initiatives and approaches intended to reintegrate prisoners and provide future livelihoods alternatives. Data was collected through interviews, informal conversations, field observations, and statistics from the Salvadoran Department of Corrections (DGCP). The findings demonstrate that the model prison farm program, while far from being exemplary in its organization of labour and production, can provide a comparatively positive environment for women inmates where the farm's productivity becomes secondary to the more relevant function of providing a space for self-transformation where new skills, labour initiatives, and innovative approaches could lead to better reintegration into society once inmates gain their freedom.

List of Abbreviations

ALIPRAC	Alimentos Practicos S.A de C.V.
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista
CENTA	Centro Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria y Forestal
CRPMI	Centro de Readaptación para Mujeres de Ilopango
DGCP	Dirección General de Centros Penales
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional
GOES	Government of El Salvador
MAG	Ministry of Agriculture
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
SIS	Secretaria de Inclusión Social
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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Introduction

In Central America, El Salvador, along with Guatemala and Honduras, have been experiencing extremely high crime rates. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Global Study on Homicide pointed out that by 2011 the region was nearing a crisis point (2011, p. 10). Since then the levels of crime remain critical. The combination of high crime rates, ineffective security sector policies, limited infrastructure and budget constraints combined to see El Salvador at the top of the global rankings of prison overcrowding. The Salvadoran prison has become a reflection and a quick reference point for the state of criminality in the country. In contrast, however, and among a series of recent government security sector reforms, a semi-open prison farms initiative has been introduced as part of a national strategy to address the overrun penitentiary system.

As part of the initiative two "model" prison farms have been established in El Salvador. According to the Salvadoran Prison Administration Agency (DGCP), the main goals of the prison farms are to facilitate rehabilitation and provide future livelihoods alternatives to inmates (2013). The work of the farms also serves to uphold Article 27 of the Constitution: "The State shall organize penitentiaries with the purpose of correcting criminals, provide for their education and instill in them a work ethic, striving for their rehabilitation and the prevention of crimes (E.S. Const.)". The two prison farms began operations in the western part of the country in 2012 and a third one is planned to become operational in 2014.

The prison farm program places prisoners in a number of agriculture-based activities, including horticulture, aquaculture, livestock production and food processing with the goal of

providing prisoners with skills that will help them reintegrate back into society. Inmates also have the comparative advantage of completing their sentences in uncrowded semi-open facilities and visit family members on weekends.¹ The product of their work, the harvest, is to provide food for the prison population and to be sold commercially as well. In short, the prison farms aim to improve the conditions of prison, provide a space for inmate self-transformation, and to reduce the costs of the penitentiary system and the social costs associated with crime.

This paper focuses on the new prison labour system being established in the Salvadoran “model” prison farms. The research is an exploration of the agricultural operations of the prison farm labour program. This includes providing preliminary insight into how the prison system is attempting to establish the conditions for the transformational goals of the program as stated by the government.

To do so, I examine:

- 1) What levels of production are being achieved and how labour and production is organized and
- 2) Explore any new initiatives and approaches related to the agricultural work of the farm that are intended to reintegrate the prisoners and provide future livelihoods alternatives.

Among some of the initiatives and approaches I explore are training for specific agricultural practices, handling of equipment, food processing, food preparation, informal educational practices, approaches that focus on work organization and other in-work activities.

¹ Inmates who maintain a positive record of behavior get a chance to visit their families on weekends.

The major research paper is divided into four chapters. Chapter one looks at the subject of the research, the Izalco Prison Farm, providing background information on the Farm and its geographic characteristics. Chapter two describes the methodology, including the Research Design and Ethical Considerations. Chapter three presents the quantitative and qualitative findings of the field research that took place in El Salvador. And chapter four provides a conclusion of the research findings with recommendations for further research.

Literature Review

Prisons, like all institutions, are reinvented and transformed by a host of local factors; in the end, success is dependent on flexibility (Dikotter, 2007, p. 1). As will be seen, Frank Dikotter's words hold true for the Salvadoran penitentiary system. However, the origins of the modern Salvadoran penitentiary are primarily the result of influences from Europe and North America. In the second half of the 19th century, the first modern penitentiary was established in El Salvador's capital (Alens, 1989). This first penitentiary, influenced by penitentiary reforms from abroad, already included various elements of the "modern" prison as found in England and the United States, such as workshops for tailoring, ironworks, weaving, cobbling, a school, a library, and a chapel (ibid., 1989, p.100). For the next 150 years El Salvador's prisons continued to be modeled, to a certain extent, on the globalized idea of the modern penitentiary. Prison became a place that served primarily to remove offenders from the community. Once imprisoned, the continued presence of offenders was justified through a few universal principles: incapacitation, deterrence, reformation and retribution (Morris & Rothman, 1995, p. x). The reformation of criminals became a particularly attractive idea to influential members of society. Salvadoran prisons to this day continue to adapt a series of activities, including prison labour, as tools for prisoner rehabilitation.

Prisons in El Salvador have been traditionally built in the urban centers of the country (Guerrero, Martinez, & Ramos, 2009). In these urban settings, Salvadoran prison labour regimes continued to revolve around a number of artisan crafts (Alens, 1989, p. 102). The appearance of a widespread landless peasantry at the turn of the 19th century created a cheap rural labour force that made additional agricultural workers unnecessary (Perez-Brignoli, 1989, p. 100). The prison farm system that existed in other parts of the world, starting with the penal colonies of the 18th century, was never adopted in El Salvador. Today, the recently established prison farms in El Salvador are, as Gondles Jr. would rightly point out, a new look at an old idea (1999, p. 6).

El Salvador, along with neighbours Guatemala and Honduras, form a cluster of regional insecurity. The activity of drug cartels and organized criminal gangs are considered to be one of the main causes. Poverty levels, social inequality and underdevelopment further magnify the problem. One aspect of the insecurity experienced in El Salvador is made visible through the constant and somewhat sensational reports of the visibly overcrowded and decaying prisons as portrayed in the national media (Coll, 2012). The country currently heads the list of prison overcrowding in the region with close to 300% occupancy rates (International Centre for Prison Studies). New prisons, such as semi-open prison farms, are intended to reduce the overcrowded conditions of the Salvadoran prison system through the creation of over 6,500 additional places while providing better living conditions in new or renovated facilities. The government's hope is that this approach will reduce recidivism rates in the long run (Landeo, 2012). In a country where insecurity is perceived as the nation's most pressing issue, however, the amelioration of prison conditions is far from being considered a priority; criminals reap what they sow is the popular thinking.

By United Nations standards Salvadoran prisons are considered inhumane and degrading (Moran, 2012). However, the Government of El Salvador's (GOES) legal responsibility for the rehabilitation of convicted prisoners is reaffirmed as a priority through public statements made by state authorities (Landeo, 2012). One public initiative pioneered by the current FMLN left-wing government is the *Yo Cambio* (I Change) program. The former guerrilla group, in its first term as head of government, is intent on establishing policies that depart, at least to some degree, from the strong hand policies of the previous right wing ARENA governments. Influenced by policies such as those found in Brazil and Ecuador, the FMLN's policies are a mixture of 21st century socialism and pragmatic capitalism, favoring simultaneously policies of social inclusion and those that maintain the capitalist model of prior governments. The prison farm program as planned intends to create the conditions for prisoner self-transformation through productive labour (DGCP, 2013). The program also seeks to take on the difficult task of increasing the employability of prisoners who traditionally suffer from high levels of unemployment and/or underemployment; a problem that plagues the entire Salvadoran labour market (PNUD, 2008, p. 5).

The prison farms, a project that links to the *Yo Cambio* program, are portrayed as a model that can transform prisoners, and society along the way, through productive work. The farm is represented as an institution that can empower inmates while providing positive effects for prison, prisoners and society alike. Prisoners can benefit from the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, work, and a better environment to fulfill their future reintegration into society. The prison farms are to reduce costs on food expenditures and are able to provide a more varied and nutritious diet. And the government and society can ultimately benefit from the lower costs of the penitentiary system and improved security (DGCP, 2013).

The Salvadoran Ministry of Justice and Public Security established the following key components as part of its strategic 2009-2014 five-year plan to improve the penitentiary system: Infrastructure, Security, Institutional Strengthening and Treatment Programs (“Memoria de Labores”, 2010, p. 2). Among the practical approaches put forward to achieve these goals was the creation of prison farms. A local newspaper reported at the time that the prison farms were an innovative proposal capable of sustaining the entire penitentiary system (Garcia, 2011). Early in 2012, as the prison farms began their work, the media reported on the cooperation and funds provided by the Taiwanese government and the European Union (Landeo, 2012; Flores, 2012). The prison farms were presented as a novel, transformative initiative supported by various international cooperation entities. From the GOES's point of view, the prison farms and the *Yo Cambio* program “practically acted as a communication link between public opinion and the work of the DGCP” (“Memoria de Labores”, 2010, p. 8). In contrast to other national security initiatives, the farms developed without debate. The lack of debate, however, was a sign that substantial information on the prison farms and its processes was not readily available.

The prison farms have been operational for just over two years. This is one of the primary reasons for the lack of studies on the Salvadoran prison farms. The literature on the prison farms is entirely composed of popular media, mainly news articles. The novelty of the prison farms program suits the exploratory approach of the subject. The novelty of the prison farms also limits the scope of the investigation. Other aspects of the program such as the long-term potential for rehabilitation or shifts in recidivism levels cannot be significantly assessed at the time.

Despite a limited literature, prison-based agriculture programs in the developing world are not uncommon. In a preliminary survey of prison-based agriculture programs around the world, such labour regimes are found in nearly every penitentiary system in Latin America, and

in a significant number of both developing and developed countries.² Despite their prevalence, prison agriculture programs in the developing world have rarely been the subject of academic research. And research on developed world prison farms, where most experts do not see a bright future for them, can only serve to marginally explain the transformation and reinvention occurring in the recent Salvadoran experience (Pollock, 2005, 132-33).

Prison-based agriculture programs fall within the greater prison labour or prison industries system. Literature on prison labour in the developed world is considerable, particularly in the United States, where prison labour regimes are well documented (for example, see, Bouffard et al., 2000; Maguire et al., 1988; Conley, 1980; Sedgley et al., 2010). As has been mentioned, aside from a number of works that focus on the conditions of prisons and prison labour regimes, research in the developing world remains limited and patchwork. A search in a popular multi-disciplinary research database, such as EBSCOhost's Academic Search Complete, for example, shows the extent of prison farms research in the developing world to be extremely limited.³

The expansion of prison labour regimes is intrinsically linked with the expansion of prisons in the 20th century. This expansion triggered comments by a number of authors with different perspectives on the complex nature of labour within prison walls (Coyle, 2001, p. 3). The works of Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939/2003), Foucault (1975/1995), Melossi and Pavarini (1981), and Ignatieff (1978) approached prisons and labour from perspectives that blended criminology, sociology and Marxist critical thought. The majority of these works identified labour regimes within and outside prison as arising from the dominant economic structures of the

² See Appendix B for a listing of countries in Latin America that have agriculture-based prison labour programs.

³ An EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete boolean search with the words prison & farm limited to the developing world gave 48 results with none of the articles reflecting on the subject of prison farms or prison-based agriculture programs.

time; a form of institutionalized punishment that maintained checks on workers and individuals within society. This perspective did not concentrate on the day to day activities of the prisoners as much as other criminology or ethnographic works did (see Sykes, 1958/2007). More recently, the analysis of prison labour has concentrated on the prison as an institution and the utilitarian relationship it has with society.

Cullen and Travis, for example, highlight the institution of prison labour as supporting multiple normative and economic goals (1984). The following factors have been given as rationale for prison industry programs: generate income and reduce cost to taxpayers, reduce idleness and maximize inmate employment, increase prison self-sufficiency and rehabilitate criminals for future reintegration to society (Pilcher, 1989; National State Auditors Association, 1997). The primarily economic goals of prison labour are tempered by a series of progressive goals such as providing work experience and teaching a work ethic that will facilitate inmate reintegration into society (Maguire et al., 1989; Ingley and Cochran, 1999, p. 84).

Whether prison labour programs work in regard to utilitarian goals or not is still debated (Bouffard, Mackenzie, & Hickman, 2000, p. 20; Conley, 1980; Ingley & Cochran, 1999; Sedgley, Scott, Williams, & Derrick, 2010). One aspect that is hard to argue is that prison labour, above everything else, is punishment for crimes committed (Breece & Goldberg, 1990). In the case of El Salvador, the prison farm initiative is officially seen as an initiative that will serve to a) reduce prison overcrowding through the creation of over 6,000 new places for inmates, and b) reintegrate inmates back into society (DGCP, 2013). As well, greater employability, food security, cost reduction, and “paying back” to society are mentioned as goals of the program (Perez, 2012). One can notice that the goals of the Salvadoran prison labour program do not differ from those mentioned earlier. The essence of the open prison farm initiative is to avoid the

harsh reality of, what Rothman and Morris would describe as, trying to train someone for freedom in a cage (1995, p. X).

The research aims to explore the production of the prison farm, in the early stages of the program, and how the work can serve as a stage for transformation for prisoners aiming for future reintegration into society. The agricultural labour and the operations of the prison farm, as a novel program, are bound to have both intended and unintended outcomes. The research will not only help to understand the dynamics of agricultural labour in prison, but how the work impacts prisoners and the prison alike.

Research on agriculture-based prison programs in the developing world, as has been mentioned, is conspicuous by its absence. One brief report by the Honduran Ministry of Security, however, describes the recently established prison farms in Honduras (2004). The report documents how an agriculture-based program in a developing world prison operates.

... and so it was decided to setup a plan for having vegetable crops, swine production, egg laying chickens, fish farms, fruit orchards, plantain fields and basic grains... Just as in all agricultural work, in Comayagua [Penitentiary], an entire infrastructure was created to organize the work groups, entirely composed of inmates, and divided by groups into the following sectors: phytosanitary, nursery and transplantation, weed control, soil preparation, irrigation and water management, harvesting, and post-harvest and yield commercialization; as well, teams have been similarly organized in the fish farming, poultry, and pig farming sections of the prison farm (Ministerio de Seguridad, 2004, p.3, my own translation).

From the report one gains insight into the operations of a prison farm. The report cites the rehabilitation of inmates through productive work, improving food security, and providing income by commercializing the product as rationale for the prison farm program (Ministerio de

Seguridad, 2004, p. 2). There is, however, a lack of information on the organization of the work and how this can aid in the future reintegration of prisoners. Mention of training programs does not go into detail into the training itself. Whether the prison farm simply replicates the work of a regular farm or whether it a unique institution with unique practices remains unanswered. The report also describes some of the organizational linkages being established by the program with other entities such as UNDP, OAS, the Taiwanese Cooperation Agency, and a number of local NGOs and government agencies. Unfortunately the prison described in the report, Comayagua Penitentiary, suffered a horrible fire that left more than 300 inmates dead; one of the worst prison tragedies recorded in history. The accident seems to have put a stop on further research as no more reports have appeared since the one described earlier.

Research and articles on other prison farms in Argentina and Guatemala, however, demonstrate that the Salvadoran example is far from an isolated case (Guerrero et al., 2009 Arriaza, 2010; Lopez, 2005). The research suggests that each country is working to fulfill some of the more general goals of prison labour programs. Each prison farm attempts to create a work platform that can benefit prisoners, the prison, and the state. In the case of Argentina, for example, prison farms have been able to adapt their work to local demands by improving production and the value of their product (Guerrero et al., 2010). In the case of Guatemala, the closed system prison farms are showing greater limitations at improving the number of prisoners involved in productive agricultural labour (Arriaza, 2010; Lopez, 2005). Also in Guatemala, in contrast, prison authorities are granting greater autonomy to those working in the farms. These works, as well as a patchwork of research, reports and articles of prison farm programs in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region also indicates that for prison farm programs to work effectively there has to be an improvement in the capacity of prisons to maintain or enhance production levels. A

prison farm program that reaches sustainable levels is in a better position to benefit prisoners and the state alike. The few disparate reports or articles on prison farms in the developing world also show that the subject has not been explored in detail. In the exploration of the Salvadoran case the lack of previous works and the current context makes the research more relevant.

The subject of the research, the Izalco Prison Farm, is an all-women's correctional institution. As such, the research also touches on aspects of gender and empowerment. Women's prison labour can carry multiple meanings and perceptions. In comparing prison labour conditions in Hungary and the United States, Haney, for example, argues that prisons can both draw and subvert broader social meanings assigned to women's work (2010). In her work she hints at the empowering nature of prison labour, and the potential disempowerment that can result from the refusal to allow women to work (Haney, 2010). Empowerment itself can be a complex term. As Kabeer points out in her work on rural women in Bangladesh accessing micro-credit loans, empowerment is a complex phenomenon, with multiple dimensions and can occur through a multiplicity of ways (2001, p. 80). Similarly, Parpart (2002) asks the reader to rethink what empowerment entails, particularly as power has layers of meaning and influence that can lead to multiple definitions of empowerment. Power shifts, we are told, involve changes in process, and in concrete outcomes that result from these processes (Staudt et. al., 2002, p. 280). As such, we can foresee how difficult it can be to assess the long-term effects, and outcomes, of empowerment at the current early juncture of the Izalco Farm project.

In the Salvadoran penitentiary system only one out of every nine inmates is a woman; an even smaller number participate in prison labour programs. Comparable figures appear in an assessment of Chile's prison education and labour centers program where out of 479 inmate participants only 5.2% were women (Armijo, et. al. 2005, p. 1). Even fewer participated in

agricultural labour. As in most parts of the world, women inmates in El Salvador make up only a small percentage of the prison population. Despite the novelty of having a considerable number of women inmates in agricultural labour in Salvadoran prisons, the claim by the government that doing the work usually performed by men can lead to women's empowerment is difficult to take at face value. Empowerment is commonly measured through indicators related to education, health, and economic or political participation. In prison, the constant subordination of agency, autonomy and space makes assessment difficult and further complicates an analysis of gender and empowerment in prison labour.

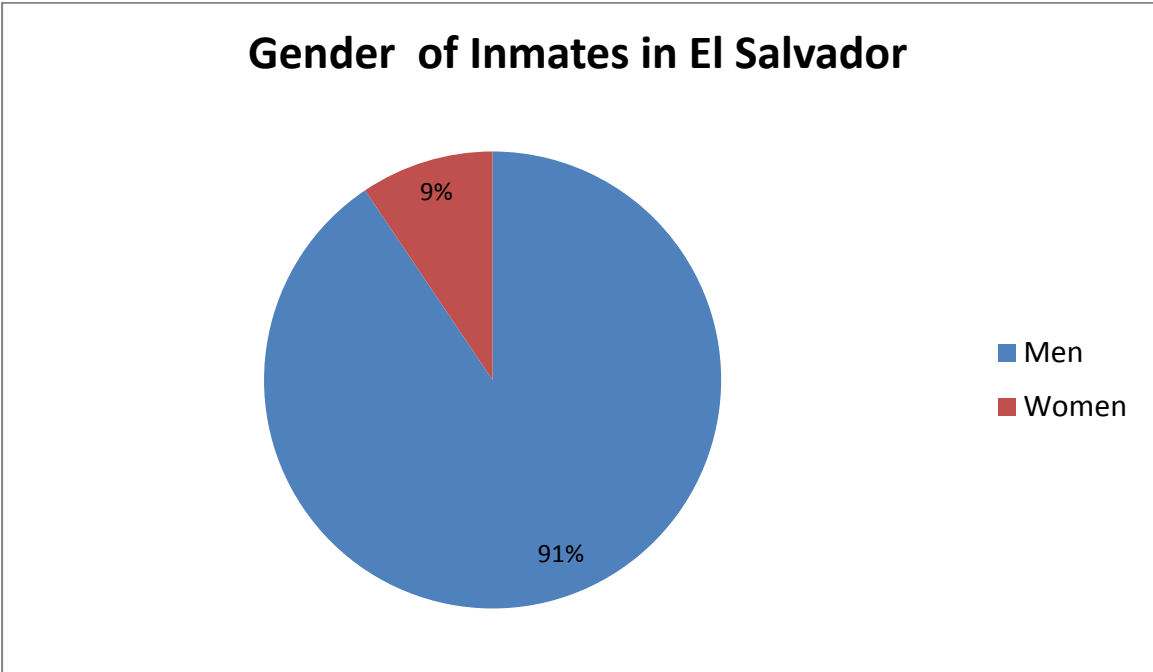


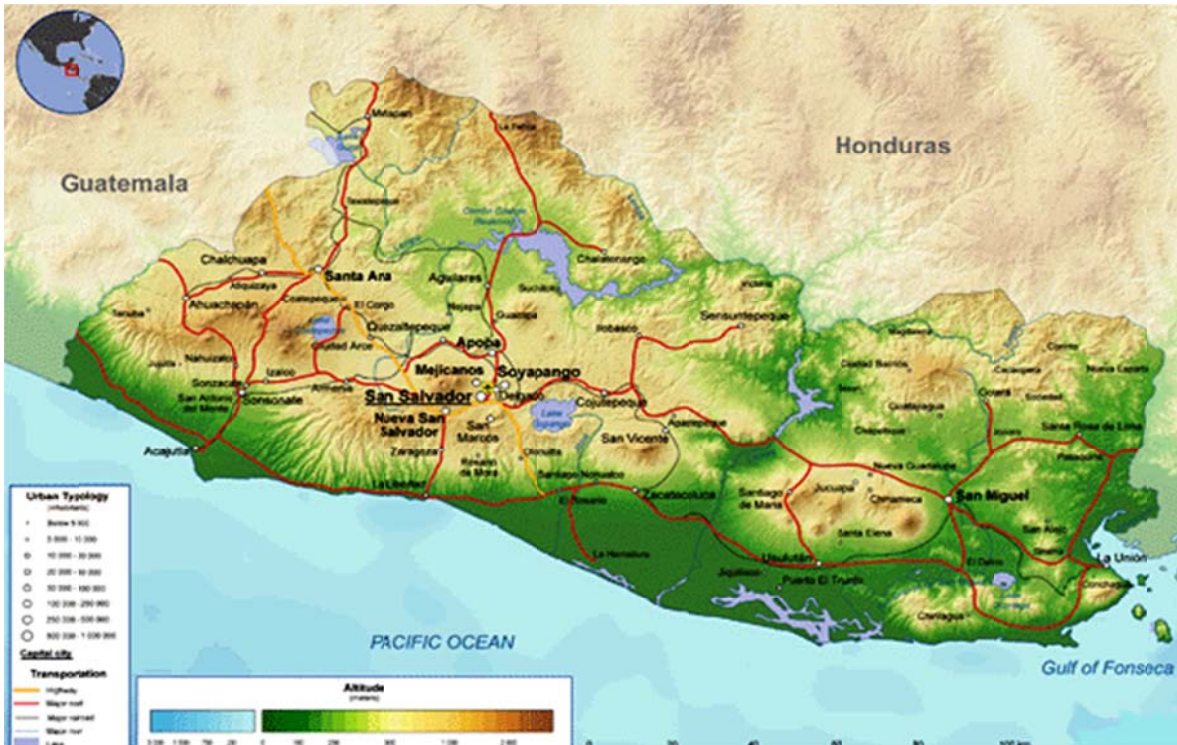
Figure 1. Inmates by Gender in Salvadoran Penitentiaries. Total Inmates: Men: 24,500; Women: 2,552. Source: DGCP, 31 March 2014.

The Izalco Prison Farm

The Izalco Prison Farm is a national penitentiary inaugurated in 2012 as part of the GOES's strategy of expansion and improvement of prison infrastructure. Within the context of penitentiary reform, the Farm was earmarked as an institution to serve as a semi-open center for rehabilitation based on inmate labour. In 2009 a deal was brokered by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG) to cede 120 *manzanas* (32.4 hectares) of land to the DGCP (personal communication).⁴ The land, once part of a greater extension used by the MAG, now holds an aquaculture station that sits right next to the Farm. Through the agreement the Izalco Prison Farm benefitted from existing facilities and agricultural infrastructure already in place. Existing facilities have served to accommodate inmates, provide office space for DGCP employees, and even house a clinic.

The Izalco Penitentiary lies approximately two kilometers north from the city of Sonsonate, the fifth largest, and just south of the looming Izalco Volcano in the western parts of the country. The Izalco Penitentiary and its surrounding lands lie in an area composed of an alluvial basin and rolling hills eroded from volcano ash deposits. The volcanic soil is rich, and much of El Salvador's coffee, the country's primary agricultural export crop, is planted on these slopes. At approximately 600 masl, the fields of the Izalco Penitentiary are found just below the ideal elevation for coffee farming and are used for mixed crops such as maize, sugar cane and varied fruits and vegetables.

⁴ The *manzana* is a measurement equivalent to 0.69 hectares. The *manzana* is a unit of area commonly used in El Salvador. In this work I use both the *manzana* (abbreviated as mz) and hectare units.



Map 1. Map of El Salvador

The Izalco Penitentiary benefits from the region's tropical, humid climate. The average annual temperature is 25°C with daily highs reaching 30°C. As the rest of the region, the area experiences well defined wet and dry seasons. Average annual rainfall is considerable at well over 2000mm (79 inches). The combination of high year-round temperatures and abundant rainfall provide favorable conditions for plant growth and agriculture (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014, 3). It is important to note that agriculture has experienced an important transformation during the 25 years since the end of the Salvadoran Civil War. A primarily agriculture-based economy has now shifted to one dominated by the services sector (ibid, p. 1).

The initial phase of the Izalco Prison Farm was depicted in the media as a worthwhile experiment. Prisoners would be shown working in agricultural activities to feed themselves, feed others, and gain a work ethic considered necessary for employment outside prison walls. Inmates

were regularly portrayed working the land wearing the emblematic yellow shirts used in the *Yo Cambio* program. The project was presented as a public initiative that would be able to reintegrate inmates back into society.

The Farm is expected to house over 1600 inmates. In its early phase the number is hovering closer to a 100.⁵ The prison, originally conceived for both male and female inmates, became an all female institution once DGCP authorities realized that a number of children would be living in the Farm. Salvadoran law stipulates that men cannot serve their sentence in the same prison where children are present. The children of inmates are housed, along with the mothers, in a smaller section of the prison in conditions adapted to the children; although still in prison, this section, as I was shown by the administrator of the prison farm, is comparatively in better shape than the general dormitory area. The greater portion of DGCP officers in the Farm are also women.

During my time in El Salvador, I also visited the Centro de Readaptacion de Mujeres de Ilopango (CDRMI), the country's only women's penitentiary prior to the opening of Izalco. After having a conversation with officials from the DGCP I was given a tour of the facilities. Ilopango is a closed institution and the contrasts with the Izalco Farm could not be more stark. By chance two women from a local women's rights organization joined in the tour. As we walked past some of the overcrowded pavilions one could not help feeling a distorted sense of hope for the inmates in the Farm, far away from this place. Ilopango, a place meant to house 600 inmates, today has close to 2,300. As we passed a sea of women sitting on the overcrowded floors of a courtyard I could also notice the increasingly disenchanted demeanor of the women's rights representatives.

⁵ To put in context, the total female inmate population in El Salvador is 1800; most of these housed in Ilopango Penitentiary where rates of overcrowding hover at 400%.

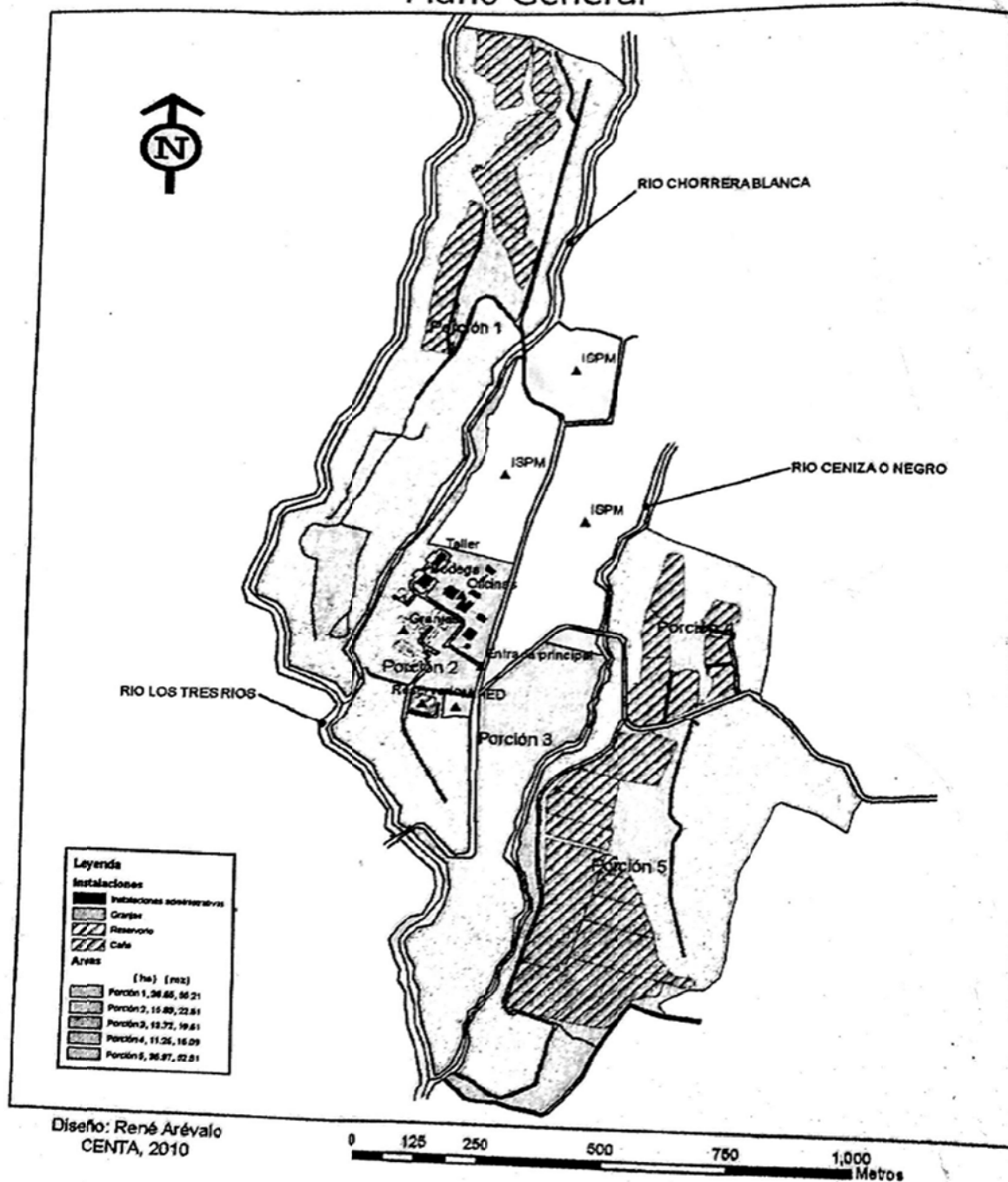
The Ilopango Penitentiary is one of several examples that resulted in the United Nations describing Salvadoran Prison system as inhumane and degrading.

During the visit to the Ilopango Penitentiary I was also given a walking tour of the penitentiary's vegetable garden. During informal interviews I had heard that the work there had some influence in the early work of the Izalco Farm. Walking past a chicken coop and a vegetable garden, the work of the agronomist I was told, I was somewhat dismayed to find the area unkempt and somewhat deteriorated. There was little evidence of agricultural work in the garden in comparison to what is taking place in Izalco. For the most part, I was told, it is the elderly prisoners of Ilopango who work on the garden. The vegetable garden proved to have little significance when little work was taking place by those who one day could be considered for a transfer to the farm in Izalco.

The Land

The land used for agricultural production in the prison farm is defined by the path of the *Chorrera Blanca* River. The river bisects the farm's land into two main areas. The land surrounding the prison's facilities is the smaller of the two. I have named this smaller area the "Garden" for its primary features are those of a market garden. The land used for agriculture in the Garden covers an area of approximately one hectare. The smaller field can be further subdivided into four sectors. Two of these smaller sectors are used for small-scale horticulture and the other two are partially shaded orchards.

Centro Experimental Izalco Plano General



Map 2. Map of the Izalco Prison Farm.

Source: Centro Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria y Forestal (CENTA), 2010

One of the orchards in the Garden has been planted with papaya trees and has already produced its first harvest. The second orchard area has been planted with banana trees and will only start producing until these reach maturity in approximately two years. The orchards require little work and thus only require the attention of a small number of inmates. The Garden plots receive greater attention and work is done on them on a daily basis despite being relatively small. The Garden is in close proximity to the buildings housing the inmates and officer facilities. The close proximity to prison officials and the occasional gaze of visitors gives the work area a particular atmosphere of laboriousness. The Garden's plots are quite small; one being approximately 20 square meters, and contains a few beds of various herbs and vegetables, such as peppers, tomatoes, coriander, etc. The other plot is located slightly further away from the main buildings in the direction of the river. The plot is also slightly larger than the one just described yet it is not as relevant in the eyes of prison officials. It is not known if this area will continue to be used for horticulture or if it will give way to other non-agriculture activities.

The large field located across the *Chorrera Blanca* River holds the main agricultural lands and is used primarily for growing crops such as corn, cassava, and beans. For reference purposes I will call this area the "Field". The Field comprises an area of 38.65 hectares (55mz). Of the close to 39 hectares of land only 5 hectares (7mz) were currently under use. The five hectares contain four large terraced areas. It is in this land that the majority of the inmates' daily work takes place. Sections of the Field have also been used to grow tomatoes and papayas.

The two distinctive areas of the Farm are particularly different in their size and scope. The smaller Garden, although modest in its size, plays a major role in the activities of the Farm. The Garden has become a sort of experimental area for the Izalco Prison Farm. The Garden provides, for the benefit of the many visitors to the farm, an agricultural extension service. Since

the Garden is the area of activity to be seen firsthand by outsiders it receives the greater amount of attention. It is here where the prison farm showcases the project as a public initiative with a positive story.

The Field across the river, however, is the long-term focus of the farm. It is here where the greatest amount of land is held. The Field has the characteristic of being comparatively difficult to access. To get to the field one must walk across a rural path and descend down a ravine where one reaches the creek of the *Chorrera Blanca* River. Once across a small bridgeway one hikes up towards the main fields some two hundred meters up along a slightly steep slope. It is not difficult terrain to walk by any means, in the dry season at least, but the terrain and distance have had an impact on the production of the land.

The difficulty in accessing the field becomes more apparent during the rainy season, where a rise in the water level of the river makes the terrain largely inaccessible. There was no definite answer on whether an alternative route could be established to have year-round access. Despite its partial isolation from the main building of the prison farm, the field borders a sparsely populated area located about 50 meters from the main highway. A dry river creek also borders this farther side of the Field. The logistics of transporting inmates has become a barrier for the development of agricultural production in the Field.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research is an exploration of the agriculture-based labour program found within the new prison farms of El Salvador, through the conduction of exploratory research in the Izalco Prison Farm located two kilometers north of the city of Sonsonate, El Salvador. The Izalco Prison Farm was chosen because it was the first prison farm to begin operations in the country, thus offering a more developed case study. In order to understand the agricultural operations of the program and its potential for women's empowerment and future prisoner reintegration I gathered information on prison farm production and the organizational and operational approaches and techniques in place by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research includes semi-structured interviews with officers of the DGCP, a structured interview with the Administrator of the Farm, analysis of agricultural production statistics, and informal conversations and field observation. Since the farms were recently established and existing literature was limited the research became framed as an exploration. The research did not seek to inquire on opinions or perceptions of the prison farm work but rather gain insight through descriptions of the operations and how the work is being supported by a number of approaches and techniques designed to improve the future reintegration of prisoners.

The research aimed to understand the basic structure of agricultural production and technologies used within the Prison Farm program and the transformative possibilities of such a program. Also, how organizational and educational approaches and training affected production and defined alternatives for prisoner reintegration into society, hence providing some measure of empowerment. The research also touched on food security of inmates with the aim of

understanding whether the farm program was capable of reducing costs on food expenditure and able to provide a more varied and nutritious diet.

Primary data on the organization of the labour and production of the farm and the various innovative approaches and practices used in the farm's work was obtained through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with key informants working directly with inmates. The semi-structured interviews and informal conversations enabled me to collect data that was able to be compared, coded and analyzed for reoccurring themes that touched upon agricultural practices, livelihoods alternatives, training and learning experiences, nutrition and food security, and agricultural practices. The DGCP's own production data was complemented by a structured interview with the Farm's Administrator. The interview focused solely on the agricultural productivity of the farm, such as land characteristics, variety of crops and techniques, equipment and machinery used, irrigation practices, the harvest, and other aspects associated directly with the agricultural production of the farm.

The study also includes observations of the agricultural areas of the prison. To this effect, access to the prison farm was requested in anticipation of the research. The DGCP's Secretary General, after numerous inquiries made by myself, and after submitting a prison research request form, approved access to the Farm. The following specific requests were granted by the DGCP:

- * Access to visit the Izalco Prison Farm on eight (8) occasions, during the morning period (8 a.m. to 11 a.m.).
- * Access to visit the CRPMI, the Ilopango central women's penitentiary, on one occasion, and after prior confirmation from the Prison's Director. The visit would serve to compare "normal" prison conditions in contrast to the facilities found in the Farm. The CRPMI itself has a small vegetable garden primarily cared for by the senior inmates of Ilopango.

- * Access to interview personnel working in the prison farm, based on availability at the time. Interviews had to take place within the prison administration's building.
- * For the interviews, a tape recorder was approved. The request was made in order to facilitate casual dialogue during the interviews, ease the transcribing process and compile as much information as possible with high accuracy of content and detail. Studies have shown that anywhere between 25 to 50 percent of the content of an interview might be lost when writing down notes (Bowbrick, 1975). A tape recorder was used with the consent of those interviewed. All recordings remained confidential and the DGPC was made aware of this in advance. All interviews were in Spanish. An interpreter was not required as I am fluent in Spanish.

The DGCP further stipulated that I had to present official University ID upon arriving at the prison. As well, that I, as primary researcher, had to follow all security protocols established by the Izalco Prison Farm. My contact in the Farm was the prison's Administrator. There was no expectation that I would ever be perceived as an "insider" in such an environment, however, my introduction as a researcher who wished to explore only the agricultural aspect of the farm did diminish, at least this was my perception, some of the apprehensions the officials might have had and clarified my purpose there. Multiple visits were requested to be able to gain greater credibility among DGCP officials and better gauge the different practices and approaches related to the agricultural work, the processes of agricultural production, and the conditions of the agricultural facilities. Observation was planned to be undertaken during the first visits and the interviews in the latter ones.

The number of semi-structured interviews was limited to the personnel involved in agricultural labour practices. I anticipated that the number of interviews would range between six and ten. The final number of interviews was six. The exploratory nature of the study and the level of research expected for a Major Research Paper made this number more than sufficient. I

purposely did a “test-run” by interviewing one of the coordinators of the technical team. The test interview helped improve the semi-structured interview matrix by clarifying the themes to be discussed as well as give a “heads-up” to other officials to be interviewed. The subsequent recognition of non-sensitive subject matter, namely agricultural production themes and approaches would play a role in reducing any misgivings had by other officials of the technical team. Participants were interviewed subject to time availability, as the participants were only available during work hours; five participants were selected by me according to a convenience sample and subject to availability. I also interviewed one of the coordinators of the technical team.

As well, I had informal conversations and informal interviews with the prison Administrator, the secretary general of the DGCP, a prison farm field assistant, the head of production, a penitentiary system sociologist and three individuals from the *Secretaria de Inclusion Social* (SIS). These employees were active in the agriculture-based work within the Farm. One of the officers of the SIS was an agronomist and the other a nutritionist who were giving capacity training to inmates. Requests for time to interview the latter were made in person and in an ad-hoc manner. All informants have remained anonymous. Finally, in addition, both media and government articles published during the initial phase of the prison farm program serve to add context and inform on the different activities the prison farm has undertaken.

Ethical Considerations

The research involved working in an environment with the presence of a clearly recognizable vulnerable population who lives under conditions of institutional incarceration, namely the inmates. The Salvadoran penitentiary system has written into its constitution a

“progressive” prison system whereby prisoners undergo stages throughout their sentence that facilitates future reintegration into society (Alens, 1989). The inmates pass through an adaptation phase (60 days), an ordinary phase ($\frac{2}{3}$ of a sentence), a trust phase, and a semi-liberty phase (Guerrero et al., 2009). All inmates working in the prison farms conform to the trust and/or semi-liberty stages of their sentences. Good conduct and personal initiative to reintegrate back into society through education and labour programs are key aspects taken into consideration to progress into the latter stages. The prison environment, however, still poses a number of considerations, if not ethical, at least practical.

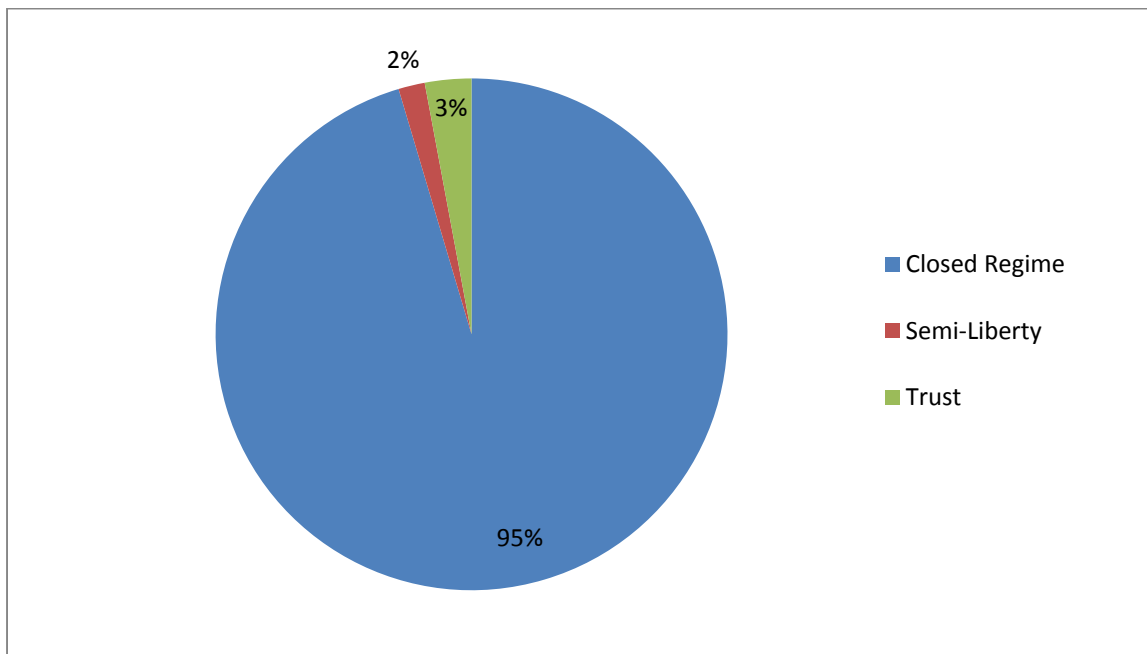


Figure 2. Inmates by Stages of Imprisonment.⁶ Source: DGCP, 31 March 2014.

The prison farm is, by all intents and purposes, a place that holds convicted criminals. The research, however, never intended to involve or come into direct contact with the inmate population. The exploratory nature of the research and the focus on the agricultural production

⁶ Out of 977 inmates currently found in the trust or semi-liberty phases, which allows an inmate to qualify for a transfer to the Prison Farms, 205 are women, 117 of these in the trust phase and 88 in the semi-liberty phase.

and those approaches related to the work of the farm did not require interviews with prisoners but rather selected personnel of the prison farm and of various governmental and non-governmental institutions working in the prison farm project. Adhering to all the security protocols and recommendations provided by the DGCP is another important consideration. Informed consent was sought before talking to individuals informing them of the purpose of the research and their role in the investigation. Since the area under study is unique and easily identifiable, the identities of those interviewed have been kept anonymous. A number of VIP informants did not require anonymity due to their positions. Prior consultation with the University's office of research ethics and integrity, through the following paragraph on the ethical conduct for research involving humans, defined the ethical position of the study:

“In some cases, research may involve interaction with individuals who are not themselves the focus of the research in order to obtain information. For example, one may collect information from authorized personnel to release information or data in the ordinary course of their employment about organizations, policies, procedures, professional practices or statistical reports. Such individuals are not considered participants for the purposes of this Policy. This is distinct from situations where individuals are considered participants because they are themselves the focus of the research. For example, individuals who are asked for their personal opinions about organizations, or who are observed in their work setting for the purposes of research, are considered participants.”

(Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2010, p. 16)

Since the research was not to involve the opinions or perceptions of participants who work or have worked in some aspect of the prison farm program but rather sought information on the operations, practices and agricultural production of the farm the University of Ottawa Research Ethics board was deemed unnecessary.

Findings

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section comprises the findings of an agricultural production structured interview undertaken with the Administrator of the prison farm. The first section also provides commentary gained through observation of the fields and of the agricultural practices of the farm. The second section consists of the findings of semi-structured interviews carried with a group of DGCP officials working with inmates at the Izalco Prison Farm. The findings of the second section focus on the organization of labour and the processes stemming from the work of the Farm. The findings of the semi-structured interviews are complemented by a number of informal interviews that took place during my visits to the Farm and by observations of the fields of the prison farm.

The data collected for this work was obtained between February 2013 and January 2014. A first visit to El Salvador took place in the first four months of 2013 in the run up to the rainy season. A second visit took place in January 2014 and served to carry key interviews in the prison farm. The initial visit to El Salvador allowed me to get in touch with a “gatekeeper” that would facilitate my access into the penitentiary system and put me in touch with key informants working in the prison farms program. During the planning stages of the research there was uncertainty on whether I would be able to secure permission to undertake research in the prison. An early chance encounter with an officer from the SIS, who was in the process of implementing a pilot project in the Farm, led me to secure a meeting with the Secretary General of the DGCP. After a fruitful meeting with the Secretary and other DGCP officials I was encouraged to prepare and present a Research Proposal to their department. It wasn't long after that I received confirmation that I would be allowed to visit the Izalco Prison Farm, interview prison officials and collect data from government sources.

My first visit to El Salvador allowed me to compile a considerable amount of informal communications with persons participating in the prison farms project, collect government statistics and gather observations of the fields, infrastructure, and equipment found in the prison farm. With the approval of the Research Proposal I carried through a second visit to El Salvador in the first two weeks of January 2014. During this period I conducted semi-structured interviews, carried the structured agricultural production interview, and gathered additional data through more casual conversations. The information provided by DGCP and SIS officials is grounded on the labour of inmates at the Izalco Prison Farm during the first two years since the farm became operational in early 2012.

Findings: Agricultural Production

The findings of the agricultural production of the Izalco Prison Farm were the result of an agricultural production interview carried out with the Administrator and head of production of the Farm. A structured interview questionnaire was handed to the Administrator. Due to time constraints, but also due to the knowledge provided by the head of production, which also performs duties as archivist of the Farm, the questionnaire was reviewed by the latter. Additional data was produced through documents describing the production characteristics of the specific crops grown in the farm. Participant observation, and in this case field observation, provided a substantial amount of insight into the workings and production infrastructure in place at the farm.

Agricultural Practices

During my first visit to El Salvador the prison farm was in its second year of operation. The land under cultivation had grown from 7 *manzanas* (4.9ha) in the first year to 12 *manzanas* (8.3ha) in the second growing season. The land expected to be used remained approximately the

same for the third growing season. During this period the number of inmates working in the farm remained stable at approximately 100 inmates. The largest crop under cultivation was maize, using 2.8 hectares in the first year, and growing to 5.6 hectares in the second.

The farming practices vary depending on the crop and the availability of inputs such as seed, seedlings, equipment and water. For the most part, however, agricultural practices remain basic. Irrigation infrastructure also remains basic; it was not rare to see inmates carrying buckets from the river bed to the fields. Activities such as planting, weeding and harvesting are done by hand using the manual labour of inmates. The application of basic agricultural practices places low requirements into the use of resources such as added infrastructure and equipment allows for the continuous activity of inmates in agricultural activities.

The use of basic agricultural practices in the prison farm has benefited from the use of a number of appropriate innovations that match the high labour-low resources characteristics of the farm. A few of these innovations were shown to me during my visits to the farm. One of these innovative practices was the use of compost. While the use of natural crop residues is common in Salvadoran agriculture the use of compost is not. In the past few years, however, influences from abroad have introduced various composting practices (Olson et al., 2012, p. 70). I was shown a small compost heap on one side of the garden. It wasn't large but looking into DGCP documents of agricultural production I was able to see that several crops had seen land prepared with compost made in the Farm.

The use of chemicals and chemical fertilizers has been sparse. A natural wind breaker is used with maize to provide cover for crops such as cucumbers. The irrigation in place is based on

gravity and is not particularly effective for the location. The innovations in place are not great in terms of agricultural practices.

There are a number of aspects that affect the production of the farm. Wind hits the area coming from either the coast or down the slopes from the mountains north of the site. The wind is not particularly strong but crops such as the green peppers and the banana trees have been affected during storms. There have been no instances of flooding since the *Chorrera Blanca* River acts as a natural outflow for any runoff. The dry season, running from October to March, has an effect on the crops on the Field. The lack of proper irrigation equipment raises issues of productivity. Initially, livestock and fish farming were planned but have yet to be implemented. The crops are grown using the traditional method of farming as used in most small farms in the country. There is very little or no use of inputs in areas such as mechanical tools, pesticides and fertilizers, draft animals, etc. During the first years there has been no use of machinery. All farming activities were undertaken with simple tools such as machetes, hoes, hand held pumps, water buckets, etc.

At the moment only two *manzanas* (1.4ha) are irrigated year round with the basic gravity irrigation system in place; an additional two are irrigated by hand and with buckets through the work of the inmates. The garden can be watered with hoses directly, or with buckets, no sprinklers or drip systems are used. The northern part of the Farm, near the plantain orchard, has an irrigation canal. The canal is fed by a pump attached to a water tank that receives water coming upstream. Across the *Chorrera Blanca* River a 600 meter PVC tube that traverses the ravine barely trickles water over the other side. The addition of a small sized pump has been recognized as important. The Field is irrigated as much as possible during the dry season. The inmates take turns in the fields and in carrying water. The irrigation takes place during the

two work shifts of the day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The approximate use of water is 8m³ per day.

The Crops

The following are the crops being harvested at the Izalco Prison Farm: Chives, Papayas, Plantains, Beans, *Loroco* (*Fernaldia pandurata*), Coriander, Cucumbers, Radishes, Tomatoes, Peppers, Maize, *Chipilin* (*Crotalaria longirostrata*), Cassava (*Yucca*), and *Chaya* (*Cnidoscolus aconitifolius*). For the most part, these crops provide a representation of the staples of Salvadoran diets. Some of the crops, however, have had greater relevance for the Farm than others.

Maize holds both a cultural and agricultural importance. Traditionally, corn provides the main source of food for Salvadorans. A wide variety of dishes are corn-based including the tortilla, a mainstay in Salvadoran diets, and the *pupusa*, the national dish. In reference to the farm, maize covered the greatest surface of land in both the first and second seasons with approximately eight m² (5.6ha) used by the end of the second year. Approximately 800 pounds of formula fertilizer (*Triple 15*) and ammonium sulfate were used to prepare the land. Fifty pounds of maize seed were used at a cost of \$96. One of the few crops specifying crop variety, Maize h515, a medium altitude maize varietal was used. Five gallons of herbicide were used at a cost of \$100. The use of chemical fertilizers and herbicides resembled common maize cultivation in the rest of the country. The biggest venture of the farm, maize, required a total of 414 hours of work by inmates. Of the total production, 3600 pounds were sold to the CRPMI; an important

percentage was kept for local consumption.⁷ In the end the maize season brought in \$453; a small amount considering the size of the land used.

Cassava, or yucca as it is better known in El Salvador, was planted in two large fields. The starchy tuberous root is another important staple in Salvadoran households. The area for cassava was prepared with organic compost and saw ten inmates plant 700 pounds of cassava stems into the ground, the traditional form of propagating cassava. 30 inmates provided 96 work hours in harvesting. On my second visit to the farm the cassava field was experiencing stunted growth due to a lack of water. Although a plant known for being drought resistant part of the cassava crop was to be lost. The irrigation coming from the other side of the river did not reach these two fields. I was not able to get specific production numbers for the second harvest season.

Chaya, or tree spinach, is a leafy shrub that is rarely eaten in El Salvador. The leaves once cooked are fairly similar to spinach and have a similar nutritional value. *Chaya* was planted in a small plot in the garden. The plant, and a series of dishes prepared with this, were a big hit in the prison and amongst some of the visitors to the farm. The novelty of the *Chaya* plant, and its use in a number of dishes, seems to have become a talking point amongst the inmates and officials in the penitentiary. The *Chaya* crop was introduced by a nutritionist from the SIS, whose intent was to introduce new foods with high nutritional value. There were no statistics on the *Chaya* crop, which reflect the fact that the harvest was used by inmates for their own consumption or for that of visitors to the farm. Despite the near irrelevance of the *Chaya* crop in

⁷ The total production figures appear low when compared to the national average for 2013 of 3000kg/ha; however this has to be framed within the context of labourers not used to farming, the early phase of the farm, and the distinct organization and dynamics of prison labour. As described in further detail in the research limitations section, a number of discrepancies were observed for the statistics provided by the DGCP that led to question their accuracy (however they could be considered as valid estimates in most cases).

the Salvadoran diet or in local agriculture, the crop held relevance not afforded to other seemingly more traditional crops.

Beans are a basic staple food in El Salvador. The low cost of beans reflects both the importance to the Salvadoran diet and to that of the prison population. Two *manzanas* (1.4ha) of land were used to grow beans. In the preparation of the land, one liter of chemical herbicide Roundup was used. 50 pounds of seeds were donated by CENTA and it took approximately a week of work by 10 inmates to plant the rows of beans. The bean variety, Nahuat, is a locally improved variety. An additional liter of herbicide was used to kill weeds surrounding the bean stalks, as well as a pesticide to treat a plague. Approximately two months later the inmates collected 328 pounds of beans. About half of this was sold to the CRPMI vocational office for \$110.25, the rest was also sold to the same institution but payment was still pending. There is some discrepancy in the summary of the beans statistics, where the final harvest seems to be incomplete. At times, the bean harvest appears as paid for by the CRPMI, at times it does not. The latter reflects potential internal consumption I was told.

The papaya is a tree producing large fruits and has good demand in the Salvadoran market. 90 papaya trees were planted in 2012. The papaya trees were donated by CENTA. The orchard was prepared with organic manure prepared in the farm. In the files on the papaya tree we have information that a pesticide and a foliar fertilizer were applied to the trees, thiacloprid and a chelated multimineral solution. The first “cut” of papayas produced 137 units with a weight of 258 pounds. An agronomist was present in the application of pesticides and the subsequent cuttings. The total number of units as of early 2013 gave a total of 861 papayas. The first 137 units were processed into “*curtido*”, a relish similar to sauerkraut traditionally made from cabbage, carrots and onions. The *curtido* was sold to the CRPMI for an \$80 profit;

additional units were sold whole to the CRMPI, 239 were given as gifts to visitors, and 29 were consumed by inmates. The papaya tree produces fruits nearly year round which makes it a good crop and easy to take care of once mature.

Of the other crops, I will only provide selected information, as their relevance was minor in comparison, but they still served to provide a number of productive instances of learning in agricultural activities. Chives are a much appreciated culinary bulb in El Salvador. Chives were sown in a small area in the Garden, in approximately five beds. Organic compost was used to prepare the land and distributed along the beds. The seedlings came from the main Ilopango prison but the crop failed in the first attempt. A lack of care and water was attributed to this failure. A second crop did produce 187 bunches, of which 16 remained for local consumption and the rest sent to the main prison in Ilopango. 34 inmates worked for approximately 60 work hours in the production of the chives crop. The failure of the first crop was considered a learning experience in the Farm.

The radish is a much appreciated addition to Salvadoran foods. The land was prepared with organic compost prepared in the farm at no cost. A mixture of hot peppers and garlic was prepared to serve as a natural low-cost pesticide or pest repellent. The mixture was prepared by the agronomist and shown to the prison officers and inmates. No insight was given into why only this particular crop received this natural pesticide rather than the chemical pesticides used for other crops. No payment appeared noted in the statistics of the Farm for the 530 bundles collected. The Administrator of the farm, however, made me aware of the potential profitability of the radish in the national marketplace.

The tomato was one the latest additions into the agricultural activities of the farm. In early 2013, approximately 500 plantings were donated by CENTA to the prison farm. The tomato crop requires additional care and has provided greater opportunities to learn the process by inmates. Prison-made trellises were created for tomatoes by the field assistant working with the inmates and the tutor team.

Findings: Perspective from Prison Farm Tutors

The collection of data for the semi-structured interviews followed a set of themes organized around an interview guide. The arrangement of the semi-structured interview around themes provides greater flexibility during the interview process (Mason, 2004). Data collected from informal interviews or casual conversations for the most part touched upon the same themes of the semi-structured interview, however, conversations due to their nature afforded greater leeway in terms of what informants decided to convey. The themes revolved around a series of topics related to agricultural labour such as the organization of labour, training received, land preparation, food processing, farming experience, etc. The themes guide the findings in this section. The semi-structured interviews were carried with a group of DGCP officials known as “*tutoras*”, tutors. The role of the tutors is to provide guidance and support to inmates. Tutors and inmates are in contact throughout the day and this creates the space for relationship-building, even if this is tempered by each group's roles and responsibilities. At least one tutor has to be present at all times during any agriculture-based activities. The interviews with the tutors were influenced, in part, by my earlier visits to the Farm's fields accompanying them.

The average semi-structured interview with DGCP tutors lasted approximately 24 minutes. All participants were asked a series of questions related to themes covering agricultural

production and labour of the prison farm. The arrangement of themes or topics served to touch all desired areas of inquiry but in no particular order and with greater flexibility. The nature of a semi-structured interview allows for greater flexibility during interviews while maintaining coherence for future analysis (Mason, 2004). Interview questions did not address perceptions or opinions of the work of inmates.

Las Tutoras

All of the tutors interviewed had worked at the main women's penitentiary in Ilopango prior to being transferred to work in the Farm. One of the more relevant findings of the interviews was that none of the *tutoras* had received any formal education or training of agricultural methods prior to their transfer. Two tutors did have empirical experience borne out of their rural upbringing, and this proved quite useful once their work in the fields began. All of the tutors are female; however, one male field assistant works alongside the tutors and the inmates as an informal technical advisor. The informality of his position is the result of the unexpected finding that the person had prior experience working in organic farming with a local NGO. His formal position was still that of a corrections officer. He was not interviewed but informal communications with him add to the findings. Additional informal conversations took place with the Administrator of the Farm, the secretary general of the DGCP, the head of production, three SIS officials, and a nutritionist working in the penitentiary system. All interviews and the greater part of informal communications took place in the Farm. The semi-structured interviews took place in an enclosed room within the administration building of the Izalco Prison Farm. There was no alternative location found to satisfy both the Administrator's and my own position regarding objectivity here.

A Typical Day

When the tutors were asked to describe a typical day of labour in the farm I was afforded an in-depth look at the daily routine of tutors and inmates alike.

One tutor gave her take on a typical day:

We as tutors rotate during the day. There are three groups. One group goes to the agriculture fields, which is on the other side of the river, and a tutor goes along with the group. Another tutor stays on this side, in the vegetable garden, and so on, [the other group in cleaning of the main areas]. At 10 in the morning they take a break, and we go along with them, into the houses, and we give them their bags, of coffee and sugar, a small lunch. Then, by 10:30 a.m., we are back at work, at 12 again we return to the houses, where we as tutors have our shifts, so that the inmates have their lunch. At 1:30 p.m. we go back to work, we go back in, always with the groups.

The other tutors expanded on this version of a typical day. A day, I was told, begins at the early hour of five in the morning when the tutors go to the dormitory area and wake up the *señoras*, as the inmates are called. After getting ready for the day ahead the inmates get their breakfast at 7 a.m. and at 8 a.m. the inmates are gathered together in a central square where they are divided into work groups. At any given moment during working hours there will be three distinct groups working in different parts of the Farm. Group A would be assigned to the crop fields across the river, group B would be tasked to work in the vegetable garden, and group C would have cleaning duties of the grounds and buildings. A small number of inmates who have children are exempted from the work groups. Another small group of women will attend the prison clinic for a variety of reasons pertaining to health and well-being.

The morning work shift runs from 8 a.m. to noon with a 30 minute snack break at ten. Between noon and 1:30 the *señoras* have their lunch and return for an afternoon shift of work until 4:30 p.m. Prison officials believe it is important to switch the working groups during the day. As such, all inmates get to work in all sectors of the farm. One of the tutors explained that the daily work is far from backbreaking, “[work] is not done all out, it is just a normal work load, based on what the body can give”. In regards to the typical agricultural activities, one tutor mentioned that each day, “we work with the women, teach them by doing what we know, teach them how to grow a variety of crops, how to fertilize, clean plants”. The phrase “teaching by doing” was repeated to me constantly as it has become a sort of unofficial motto for the work of the Farm.

The work day ends at 4:30 p.m. for inmates, however, for the tutors the day goes on. There are eight tutors working in the Farm. As tutors work in shifts, each tutor gets one of three houses. The tutor will be in charge of the keys of the house and of making sure the condition of inmates in the house is good. A tutor described their responsibilities as being, “to check and see if they are sick, if they are sad, what is going on, and advise on these to the coordinators”. A slightly more difficult but unusual task I was told is for tutors to maintain checks on levels of aggression amongst the women. The end of the day for the tutors comes at 9 p.m. when a check list is passed to roll call the inmates. In between this time the women change, shower, have their dinner, listen to music or watch TV, they smoke cigarettes at 8 p.m., and occasionally, watch a movie at 9 until the end of this. It is a complete day, both for inmates and *tutoras* alike.

Organization of Labour

The organization of labour in the Farm is implemented by the Administrator but usually delegated to the coordinators of the tutor team. The coordinators in turn make the decisions to divide the inmates into three groups, each working in different areas of the Farm. As mentioned before, the labour is further arranged into morning and afternoon shifts. Each group works with one tutor, and the presence of a coordinator is possible as well. Unless there are specific issues the Administrator of the Farm will not get involved in the daily decision-making process or organization of labour. Once in the field, the tutors take their groups and assign particular duties to each inmate. In the Field inmates work in pairs. All the work seems to be assigned equally, with exceptions for women feeling ill, and those women with children or pregnant.

When learning a particular new skill or planting technique, all the women gather together to see how this is done and then each one applies this on the ground. All women work the same, no particular inmate receives special tasks. There is however, a large demand to work in the Field across the river. The reasoning behind this, I was told by one tutor, “is that time passes faster in that part of the Farm”. Indeed, in the Field there is more space and more work to be done. If the inmates are familiar with the task they are fairly self-reliant and tutors are only there to follow their work.

Knowledge of Agriculture and Training

There was a consensus by the tutors that nearly all of the inmates had no experience in agriculture prior to their work in the Farm. One of the coordinators said that not one single inmate had any experience in agriculture. Other tutors agreed with this observation, however, one tutor disagreed and said that somewhere around 10-20% of inmates had some experience. Both of these views could be correct. Many of the inmates could have lived for a period of time

in a rural or peri-urban area where basic agricultural duties were performed; it would not be unusual for some of the women to have had some experience in agriculture when young, in family plots or working in coffee farms during the harvest period. At the same time, however, it is also very likely that none of the inmates were “farmers” prior to their incarceration, nor that any had formal training or studies in agriculture. One tutor explained in this regard, “the inmates told me it was here, in the prison farm grounds, that they have learnt all these [agricultural skills].”

In regards to the prior experience of the tutor team, one mentioned that she had some experience in farming. She described how she had acquired knowledge of farming when as a young girl she had helped her father in their small farm. She also said she worked as an adult in farms. When asked to be more specific she described her work in coffee farms as one of hundreds of seasonal “pickers” of the ripe coffee harvest. The labour described by the tutor has been done by generations of rural peasants in the country, many of these landless or with small subsistence plots. Employment in coffee farms is for the most part seasonal, and in El Salvador it is not rare to have women and children working side by side with men. Another tutor said, “I have not had any agricultural experience but I did work in a farm before, a coffee farm.” For this tutor, picking coffee was not entirely considered agriculture. One tutor mentioned that just as the inmates in the farm, she had absolutely no experience, and that what she knew she had learnt in the farm. “I learnt by doing”, was the remark, to once more emphasize the unofficial motto of the Farm. Learning by doing, I was told, has served as a reliable instrument of teaching (pedagogy) among the women. For the most part, agricultural tasks involve *tutoras* following the instructions of the DGCP agronomist and applying this knowledge together with the inmates.

Implementing a pilot prison agriculture program without providing training seemed odd at first. During my first visit in 2013 an agronomist from the SIS began to provide agriculture-based training to inmates. The training, one half of a project to strengthen the nutrition of inmates in the Farm, involved small-scale organic gardening. This project is the first formal training in agriculture. The methodology used by the trainer was learning by doing, to seamlessly enter the work of inmates. Here I realized that there had been plenty of informal training in place at the Farm. One tutor, while acknowledging the new training project, remarked that she had taught inmates how to grow several crops, by preparing the land, weeding, and learning how to make compost. The motto “*enseñar haciendo*”, teaching by doing, or teaching through action, was the mode used to transfer know-how to the inmates. Somewhat surprising, however, was the fact that the tutors themselves had yet to receive formal training at any point in their placements at the Farm. They were equally “taught by doing” through visits by the agronomist who gave instructions.

During the training or showing how work is done portion of work, I found the tutors doing their primary work duties with the inmates while also learning new practices themselves. When working on a task the tutors asserted that they did not say to the inmates what to do but rather did it together. Tutors did many times work alongside inmates. However, the supervisory role of the tutors was always palpable in the field. At any time, a tutor could go from providing guidance to disciplining an inmate. The relationship between inmates and tutors, however, was amenable for the most part, with a semblance of camaraderie due to the time spent outdoors under the sun. They share words with each other and in the end tutors do end up fulfilling their primary role in guiding inmates.

The second component of the SIS pilot project was to train inmates in food preparation techniques. The project evolved over eight weeks and involved eight inmates. The training was such a success that more women declared their interest and a second training period was prepared for 30 inmates. A few times I heard the story of the preparation of tamales and other foods using farm-grown herbs and vegetables. One particular plant, *Chaya*, a large leafy shrub that can grow wild and is not commonly used for food in the country, was wildly claimed to be something of a new breakthrough, despite its edible status in a number of other Latin-American countries. All visitors to the farm seemed fascinated by the use of this plant.

Individual tutors received additional training in other subjects at the *Escuela Penal*, a Correctional Services Training Institute. One tutor remembered, “I was trained in early childhood care, though I am not aware for what particular purpose I was trained in this.” When I speculated that the training might have something to do with the soon to be built childcare center she agreed that this was very well possible. It seemed strange that the training was not designed with clear objectives in mind. The tutors all confirmed that they had not received specific agriculture-based training, but rather based on instructions from the DGCP agronomist; they had learnt by doing.

One tutor accompanied a small number of DGCP employees to visit their counterparts at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, an American prison farm commonly known as Angola. I asked the tutor about her experience. The tutor claimed to be impressed with the size and infrastructure of the prison. She described the experience, “it was something unforgettable, to observe their large fields, their tools, how they manage the tools, and how they work with the inmates.” She went further describing how she applied her experience in the Farm,

“Yes, I tell my coworkers to do this as it was something they did over there, and could work here, so we try it, if it works we keep on doing this. We also explained to them how we work here, the big difference is that they [inmates] don't leave Angola, like the women here, who leave on weekends. There they are left to roam the grounds of the prison, but cannot leave.”

When asked if she could foresee a similar state of development in the Salvadoran Prison Farm she exclaimed that there are vast differences in terms of resources. “The US has money, enough to have tractors, vegetable cleaning equipment and so on, and the Izalco farm barely has any means to acquire basic goods”, at the moment, the tutor concluded.

Agricultural Practices

The preparation of the land is one of the first aspects to consider when planning the agricultural season. The tutors interviewed were very candid on the generalized use of swidden techniques to prepare the land. The Administrator of the Farm told me that the fields across the river had been fallow for a number of years. The first year of work involved a good amount of removing large swathes of high grasses, known colloquially as *zacate*. The removal of *zacate* was then combined with burning of what was left on the ground. The only agricultural instruments used during this period were matches for fire and machetes for cutting. Swidden cultivation is a process where existing vegetation is cut, stacked, and burned to provide space and nutrients for cropping.

When I inquired on whether they were aware of this, tutors uniformly remarked no. During one of my visits for what was the second growing season of the farm I observed first-hand how the burnt vegetation got mixed with crop residue left on the ground, mostly corn

stalks, from the previous growing season. For the farm, this was an efficient and inexpensive form of adding nutrients to the land in lieu of expensive chemical fertilizer.

The tillage of the land is done by hand with the use of simple hoes. No mechanical instruments are used. The beds and furrows are created with hoes as well. The *tutoras* knowledge of land preparation was basic and yet it fulfilled the role required to grow crops. Specialized knowledge had yet to be transmitted by the farm's agronomist. "I had knowledge because of my dad, who was a farmer, always helped, I used to work in farms also, so more or less I have some knowledge and could share this with the *señoras*, and do it together; what they do we do as well, showing how the work is done", replied one tutor.

Despite the inmates little to no experience in agriculture the tutors affirmed that they did not encounter technical difficulties in cutting the *zacate* with machetes, or tilling the land with hoes. One tutor remarked that a fair few of the women were adept to weeding and cutting the tall grass since a few had worked in mitigation projects under the *Yo Cambio* program in hillsides near the capital San Salvador.

The Farm still has vast amounts of land not under cultivation. In this regard I asked the Administrator if the use of a tractor would happen. He claimed that this is very well possible, but not something for the near future. The men's prison farm has received funding that will go into acquiring two tractors. One tutor, in being asked about tools and machinery said, "this is where we have relative poverty, but for us the most important thing is our ability to work and our drive". The focus on human capital is a practical approach due to the characteristics of the land, the number of inmates, and the purpose of keeping the women working.

When asked to describe their work on growing a variety of crops and vegetables, 80% of the tutors mentioned how the team had adapted well to the various crops. I inquired on the knowledge of companion growing. Although there was no formal knowledge of this, in practice, it had been put in place for growing maize, beans and squash. The combination of these crops has taken place since pre-Columbian days. No other use of companion growing was implemented. One interesting response to growing beans and maize together was articulated by a *tutora*, “I cannot explain why we plant beans and maize together but I was told by the agronomist to do it”.

At the time of my visits I was shown a small compost heap. I asked about the compost process. All of the tutors were glad to expand on their experience of using waste to make compost. Once more no formal training had been provided but inmates and tutors alike received instructions and made compost.

When asked about any issues with plagues I was told, uniformly, that there had been no instance of plagues. I asked about the use of pesticides. One tutor happily explained the use of a mixture of hot pepper and garlic to spray vegetables in the Garden. I did not hear more from the tutors on the use of chemical pesticides, however, statistics provided by the head of production at the Farm showed the Field had received a series of applications of pesticides; this does not depart from the norm in Salvadoran agriculture.

Irrigation, or the lack thereof, is one of the major barriers for improved production and extension of work in the Farm. There is tacit recognition by the tutors that the irrigation system in place, which barely drips into the Field across the river, limits immensely the potential to have multiple growing seasons. The field assistant, who has knowledge of irrigation practices, made it

clear that water was not the issue but rather the need for investment in a pump to get the water from the river or from the wells to the fields. The question was posed to the Administrator during my first visit. He mentioned that the issue was being looked at. During my second visit there was still no noticeable amelioration of the irrigation system.

The first harvest of the farm was shared amongst the inmates. The DGCP authorities made sure that the first harvest was to be enjoyed by the *señoras* in its entirety. I was told by one tutor that this had generated a good amount of good feeling among the women, to be able to see the results of their work. The second harvest was distributed differently. The Administrator said a certain percentage remained in Izalco while the greater amount was “sold” to the prison in Ilopango. While there was a consensus among tutors on the distribution of the harvest, all tutors were uncertain of what came of the harvest once outside. It was understood that the greater part of the harvest went towards Ilopango, to be given to inmates there and/or to be put for sale in the store of the prison. Documents on the agricultural production of the farm confirmed this. Each crop had amounts ascribed to each. There were a good number of crops with payments “still to be paid”.

Another tutor observed, “It was great, the first [harvest] was great considering they were beginners, they ate it all themselves, for the next ones it was sold as institutional goods, in part sold and in part given as gifts to the other prison for other inmates. Of the little that is gained though selling, it’s used for per diems, or to buy medicines, through the system, to get toilet paper and little things.” It was clear that very little financial benefit is being accrued through selling the produce in this the early days of the Farm.

A tutor clarified the distribution of the crops through an example. “If 3000 heads of corn were harvested, 1000 would remain in Izalco and the rest would go over to Ilopango to be shared among the greater number of inmates there”. This meant that 1000 ears of corn would remain for an Izalco prison population of 100, however, for Ilopango 2000 ears would be distributed among 1000 inmates. One tutor said, “the *señoras* are aware that they will only get a part of the harvest even if they put all the work, but they [inmates] are aware that the rest is going to other inmates in Ilopango.” All of the women in Izalco had served a number of years in Ilopango prior to their transfers to Izalco.

Food Processing

In regards to food all the tutors related how the crops were being used to make *atol*, *elotes*, jams and jellies (papaya), tamales, and quesadillas. I was shown a recently-built room where seven women laboured in a kitchen equipped with modern instruments. The building was sponsored by ALIPRAC, the company that provides food for the entire prison population. I was told these women were selected due to their work, dedication and good behavior. There is also an oven in a more traditional kitchen area where bread and tortillas are prepared. The tutors were clear that many of the women would be interested in working in the kitchen; a place where women could see themselves working in the future.

The example of the pilot project involving food processing and preparation, imparted by the SIS, further confirms the recognition by the women that working in a kitchen-like environment preparing and processing food is something more practical for their future livelihoods, in contrast to farming, and also perhaps a less taxing type of work. One tutor added, “the *señoras* make jams from pineapple, mango, and strawberries; they buy the fruit and then

make jams in Izalco”. The jam would then be sold by half-pounds in the penal system stores, such as that found in the Ilopango. The SIS pilot project is hoped to be the first of a series of training programs within the prison to provide a greater set of skills beyond basic agricultural activities.

Nutrition and Health

A greater sense of improved well-being seems to be associated with a more varied diet. I did not hear, however, even from the DGCP nutritionist, that the harvest had any positive effect in terms of a healthier nutrition, such as having less fatty foods prepared, or foods with more nutritious content.

There was also an understanding that the food provided by the state, through the private company ALIPRAC, was neither sufficient nor fulfilling of a person’s diet. The additional physical exertion of the women led to SIS to donate foodstuffs to complement the additional calories being used up while working on the Farm. SIS donated oil, flour, beans, and rice. The factor of having women preparing food in the prison did lead to “better tasting and better cooked food” according to tutors. The new diet was considered a noticeable improvement over the ALIPRAC diet. A tutor remarked:

It helps, as they get more food than just regular ALIPRAC, that they also prepare it, they have the kitchen group that prepares rice and beans, *pasteles*, *pupusas*, and they are happy to get that, prepare more with some food donations, as the ALIPRAC food, I imagine, cannot really fill them up, so they feel better, and as they need more energy, more food for the agriculture work.

Another tutor alluded to the incomplete nutritional content of ALIPRAC, by saying that prior to the harvest the *señoras* would be spending their own money (given to them by family

members), to spend in the local store, but the additional food had reduced this considerably. Since there was a mention of money, I inquired about the possibility for salaries for the women's work. One tutor mentioned, "In the future perhaps, but not right now, the land has barely been in operation and does not produce great quantities yet. At the moment the project is not for profit, but more about teaching them something, for them to feel that to gain something is hard, so that they can live with their fellow inmates and potentially better with society."

Links with the Outside

I asked the tutors if any links had been established with the outside as a result of the work and the production of the prison but the answer was no. The Administrator of the farm told me that a few organizations, such as Save the Children, an international NGO, began to work with the inmates who have children. In regards to the agricultural labour and production, however, it was only the recent training provided by the SIS. An early attempt to partner inmates with employees from the neighboring MAG faltered early on after what seemed to be issues between the male employees of the MAG and the female inmates in Izalco. There was no official explanation for the failed experiment, however, one tutor made an allusion to emerging romantic relationships as potentially being the reason for the fallout. The Administrator mentioned there were no plans in place to create links with the outside such as establishing a store to sell the product in the Farm, or to create links with the local community or nearby schools.

Gender

When I met the Secretary of the DGCP to discuss my research project, she mentioned how the Farm was empowering the inmates. By doing the work usually done by men in Salvadoran society, namely farm work, the Secretary assured me that women began to see

themselves as able capable and gained confidence and autonomy. The tutors agreed with this statement. However, there were indications that very little thought had gone into the role gender was playing in the work of the Farm. One tutor did consider that the *señoras* were learning new things, and that this was already empowering enough. Two tutors related how they had heard of men at the other prison farm complaining about the tough conditions of outdoors farm work. The realization that the women were “tougher” than the men led to a tutor exclaiming, “it’s a tough job, and they did not have experience, but they have done it”. In a similar light another tutor agreed, “yes, because in reality this work is for men, tools and all, the machete, but [the women] do it and work just like men, and they feel good working, because they themselves show initiative in setting goals, and they enjoy it.”

One tutor mentioned:

“it’s nice, for them to say that they can do it too, not only man, many women say this, that they have proven they can do what before was thought only men could do, it’s hard, it’s tough work, going around the maize fields, toiling on the ground is not easy, so they are increasing their capacity to “show resilience” in the agricultural field but also as women, so they will carry with them two very strong experiences.”

Livelihoods

I asked the tutors if they foresaw the work of the farm as able to provide a greater chance at reintegration into society and to be better able to gain a livelihood, as one of the stated official government goals for the Farm. The tutors were all adamant at the challenges of earning a living in the field of agriculture for released inmates. One tutor expanded on the point of view of inmates and the realities of Salvadoran life. “First they would need a piece of land, where to grow, because it’s necessary, but if they have the will also, because if they do it here just because

they will leave faster or because the law or a judge requires it, then outside they will not work on this, and work somewhere else. But if they would put in it practice they could since they have the basic knowledge.” I queried the women on the training being received in terms of agricultural techniques and food preparation. The feeling by the tutors was that the food preparation was more practical, as women could go and work in *pupuserias*, restaurants, etc. In regards to agriculture there were limited options that could be done outside.

One tutor, however, mentioned that some women, perhaps half-jokingly, told her that even if it was by growing radishes they would make a living once free. This anecdote, despite its tone, suggests the potential for gaining income from agriculture. It is perhaps unfortunate, as a tutor explained, “Once the inmates are out we do not know what happens to them.”

Another tutor added, “food preparation, it seems [could work], because not all have a good piece of land to grow, and that's important, because with land one has the means for a living and feed oneself, but there is little use to get training and know that there is little use for it after, since agriculture is for farmers, and here very few are agricultural people, farmers, very few, if any.”

The lack of land is certainly a significant barrier. Throughout Latin America, the gender asset gap in respect of ownership of land is vastly important for women and livelihoods (Deere & Leon, 2003). For inmates thinking about using their horticultural skills as self-employed farmers the lack of land and difficulty of acquiring this or accessing capital could be an insurmountable obstacle. Gender inequality in land ownership is normally related to male preference in inheritance, male privilege in marriage, male bias in community and state programs of land distribution as well as gender bias in the land market, with women less likely than men to be

successful buyers (ibid). While Salvadoran land ownership does not strictly follow these dynamics, aspects such as having a criminal record, a lack of recognizable education, and a lower socio-economic status can further serve to complicate the ability of an inmate to get a loan or a piece of land to grow vegetables for example.

On the Strengths of the Program

In this regard, one tutor mentioned that perhaps the strength of the program is that some women do get freedom earlier in their sentences. An added benefit of being in the prison farm is that inmates, in exchange for every day worked, reduce their sentence by three days. Four months of work translates to one year less of the sentence. As one of the purposes of the program is to reduce prison overcrowding perhaps the speedier “processing” of inmates is a positive. This view was also shared by another tutor, who mentioned that there was a preference in where to work. In her view she was aware that the *señoras*, “prefer to work on the Field, because over there one “works”, and time passes by quickly. Here on this other side [the Garden] they perhaps find the work easier because of the smaller grounds, and maybe feel time passes more slowly”. Time plays such an important role in the mind of the prisoner that anything that can have perceived gains can lead to an improved disposition.

On the view of the prison in the future, in five years, one tutor viewed the future of the prison in uncertain terms. She believed that with the opening of the children’s unit there would no longer be any land to grow in the Garden. The other side, she said, “can only serve to grow a few crops, and with little water, not so good, and also unable to reach the other side in the winter rainy season”. Another tutor concluded, “what is needed to improve is tools, as there is personnel

to support the work, but tools and machinery, and to have someone here to keep teaching us new skills and ideas is really important.”

Conclusion

The Izalco Prison Farm is still in its infancy. This study provides insight into the labour and agricultural production of the Farm in its second and third years of operation. The intent of the research has been to explore the workings of the Farm to provide insight into a project labeled as transformational by the Government of El Salvador. The conclusion connects the findings of the research with the reality of the Salvadoran context. The limitations of the research are described before outlining a series of emerging themes and ideas that relate to the agricultural labour and production of the Prison Farm.

Research Limitations

The responses provided by officers working with DGCP were considered to be truthful at all times. There was indication, however, that officials were ready to impress a good opinion of the work of the Farm and of the DGCP on me. I took this as only a normal response due to the context of the Farm. The main officers of the Farm and the DGCP were adamant that the project was a good one and that the benefits were already noticeable. It has to be remembered that the Farm is visited on a regular basis by officials from local government, NGOs, and international organizations. The government itself has made it clear that the Farm and activities in the *Yo Cambio* Program are intended as a communication link between the institution and Salvadoran society.

As more and more time was spent with the tutors and other DGCP officials in the Farm the less important it became for them to showcase the positive stories of the Farm. It had been with foresight that I decided to observe the work of the farm in my first visits and leave interviews for the latter ones. During my time in the Farm the presence of inmates and their at times active nature made me consider that interviewing inmates would have been a significant addition to the work. The information provided by the tutors, other officials, and the supporting evidence gained through observation, however, proved sufficient for the scope and purpose of this research. Access to the other prison farm, the all-male Santa Ana Prison Farm, would have been an important addition to the research and most likely result in gaining better insight on the DGCP program. Once more the scope of the research made a single case study appropriate.

During my second visit to El Salvador I discovered that the DGCP had undergone important changes in its personnel structure. One penitentiary had become involved in a matter that quickly became politicized. The politicization of the issue led to wholesale changes in the Department. The Director and Sub-Director of the DGCP had been removed as well as the

Director of the Ilopango Women's Penitentiary. In the Farm, the administrator had been replaced as well. For the purposes of my research, the initial contact I had at the DGCP, the Secretary General, had not been affected by the changes and remained at her position. This allowed me to continue with my research in the Farm as planned. It also illustrates the potential lack of stability found in many areas of government work in the country and the precarious nature of programs such as that of the Prison Farms.

The Realities of Women's Agricultural Labour in a Salvadoran Prison Farm

The tutors had little to no experience in agriculture when they began their work at the Farm. A number of tutors had lived in rural settings, where they became familiar with the rural lifestyle of the small-scale Salvadoran farmer. Their knowledge of some basic growing techniques, how to clean the fields, when to prepare the land, when to harvest, and other basic knowledge served to contribute to the “learn by doing” methodology that would be applied in the work of the Farm. Likewise, the inmates were also described as having limited experience in agricultural practices. The lack of agricultural knowledge and experience is nothing more than a reflection of the greater reality for women in El Salvador. As pointed out by Boserup on her seminal work on women in economic development, women in Latin America continue to play a small role in agriculture (2007, p. 16). And it is in the novelty of having women performing agricultural duties that separates this case from other prison-based agriculture programs found in other correctional systems around the developing world. The expectations of the production and labour of the Izalco Prison Farm have been tempered by the recognition that women could benefit more from the transformation experienced through non-traditional activities rather than the output of the activities themselves.

As is the case in most of the world, El Salvador has also experienced an upward trend in the internal migration from rural to urban areas. As well as a decrease in the rural population, during the past decades the Salvadoran economy has shifted from one primarily reliant on agriculture to one based on the services sector. The overall result has been a reduction in the relevance of agriculture as an economic activity and a parallel drop in employment in the sector (see tables below). What this reflects is that for Salvadoran women, as was the case with tutors and inmates alike, it was common to have never worked in agriculture, but perhaps more importantly, to not have become attracted to such type of work. The lack of agriculture-based know-how, I was told by a few tutors, was never an issue in the work of the Farm itself. The lack of formal knowledge led to the development of a learning relationship between inmates and tutors, one of “learning by doing” as I was repeatedly told during my visits to the Farm. The learning by doing approach was also adopted for other formal and informal training activities that were favored by inmates, such as food processing and food preparation, activities that could derive in employment or livelihoods once outside of prison.

Table 1. Employment in Agriculture in El Salvador (% of total employment)

1980	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2012
38	10	28	22	19	21	21

The 1989 figure was taken eight years into the Salvadoran Civil War, which had vastly affected agriculture and rural areas and the capacity to capture accurate data. Source: ILO

Table 2. Rural population in El Salvador (% of total population)

1980	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2012
56	51	47	42	39	36	35

All Central American nations have experienced drops in rural populations as based on % of total population, seeing simultaneous large increases in urban areas. Source: World Bank

In terms of knowledge and the extension of knowledge one came across at the highest level the DGCP agronomist. The agronomist, a person that visits the Farm once or twice a week from his office near the capital city, never managed to meet with me despite my stated interest in interviewing him as a key informant. Despite not meeting the agronomist it was clear that the greater part of work of the Farm was developed by him. From the description of tutors one could gauge that the agronomist made quick visits to show how to do something, provide guidance, or to drop off inputs. In regards to the work of the agronomist, one tutor said “it’s good, he teaches us; he works well.” A succinct description of a person who has a great influence in the work and production of the Farm.

The fact that the agronomist was not on the Farm permanently did reflect negatively on the organization of the labour and the agricultural practices. The organization and production of the Izalco Prison Farm would certainly reap the benefits of having a professional agronomist present at all times. In the Farm, and despite possible misgivings about the work of the agronomist, tutors described the man as patient with the inmates.

The prison farms and the *Yo Cambio* program are portrayed as a model that can transform prisoners through productive work. The production of the Farm early on is labour intensive, based on the labour of the inmates. It follows fairly basic agricultural practices and has minimal requirements of financial investment in the agricultural activities and inputs. The production levels of the Farm are relevant, but an emerging theme was that the continuous activity of the inmates was by far more important. The simplicity of agriculture, from traditional slash and burn techniques for preparing the land, the manual tillage and furrowing, the harvesting by hand, the use of basic tools such as hoes and machetes, all served to maintain the inmates active during the

week. The activities of the inmates in the Farm, different from what the inmates have been used to in the closed-system Ilopango Penitentiary, are the reason why DGCP officials have come to regard the program as self-transformational.

The training provided by the agronomist of the SIS, for example, provided a better indication of how structured training could enhance the skills of the inmates and, ultimately, the productivity of the Farm. It provided much more hands-on and applied training, keeping with the learning by doing methodology. I was given a copy of the Project Proposal describing the module. It is in line with a strategy that could serve to enhance livelihoods and employability. In addition to this, however, the DGCP would require to organize training modules that could become recognized outside of the prison system, in a similar manner to how these are organized in other countries that provide education and training with certification of achievement.

The majority of inmates in the Izalco prison, and prior to their incarceration in the Ilopango penitentiary, lived in urban areas. The vast majority had little to no experience in agricultural matters. In time the inmates were able to adapt to their new environment and work on a daily basis. For most inmates, whether working in the Field or in the Garden, the rural environment was a radical variation in their way of living and working. It is in the experiences of the new surroundings and new tasks that the government found the possibility that the Farm provides a space for transformation; a different life to establish new habits.

As has been described, inmates at the Farm had little experience in agriculture prior to their arrival there. Could their newfound skills be applied to a future livelihood option, such as market gardening or other agriculture-based activities? A number of tutors seriously doubted this. The main perception was that the work and what is learnt is appreciated by inmates.

Statistics on labour mention that over half of women in the country are underemployed and thus gain their living in the informal economy (PNUD, 2008, p. 7). For women with a criminal background the percentage would be higher. When I asked a tutor if the inmates could use the knowledge acquired in the farm once they gained their freedom, she responded, candidly, “Maybe, maybe it could happen”. The extent to which prison labour can serve for future livelihoods is inconclusive at this point. It is difficult to suggest that the findings provide sufficient evidence indicating the possibility of future livelihoods where the labour in the Farm fosters little initiative. By far, I was told, the greatest incentive to work on the farm was the benefit of leaving the prison earlier; inmates were reducing their sentences for every day worked.

In contrast, however, a number of inmates had received food preparation and food processing training. The preparation of jams, sweets, bread, *tamales* and other food items were quite appealing to the inmates. This is most likely, once more, related to the reality of El Salvador, where thousands of women work in restaurants, food stalls, and small diners in informal or low-wage labour. For future livelihoods, there is a difference between a woman's ability to sell her own food rather than work for wages as an employee in a restaurant. Aspects of self-sufficiency and empowerment come into play here and training benefited from moments where initiative was demanded from inmates.

There was an emerging understanding that the labour and productivity was not the primary goal of the Farm. The Farm, and the labour of the *señoras*, was developing as an activity that could work primarily to improve the general condition of the women. El Salvador still experiences a culture of “machismo”. The country, however, has also experienced important changes in gender relations as a result of the civil war of the 1980s (PNUD, 2008, p. 16). In a study looking at gender and democracy in El Salvador, Luciak describes the process of

empowerment experienced by women who became active participants in the guerrilla forces during the civil war (2001).⁸ With this in mind, there is perhaps some merit in attempting to empower women by placing them in a role usually ascribed to men, similar to the unexpected roles taken by women during the civil war.

As suggested by Desai, in a study of NGOs in Bombay and empowerment of women, the process of acquiring power within to have the power to make individual changes can be achieved by opening up possibilities for women (2002, p. 231). The prison farm might be able to stimulate a similar process by challenging the roles of women in Salvadoran society while simultaneously opening up new opportunities for women. In understanding that inmates were doing the work of “men”, there was an indeed an element of empowerment for the *señoras*. A way to say, we can do what men do, and we can do it better. Many of the personnel working in the prison farms commented that the women worked better than their male counterparts in the Santa Ana Prison Farm. A similar case occurred during the early years of the civil war. In an area under the influence of the guerrillas, a group of women tired of hearing men's negative comments about their work in the fields, organized a women's farm collective. The first harvest was said to be among the largest in the zone and the group outproduced many all-male farms (Montgomery, 1995, p. 123). In the end, there is little doubt that women are able to take pride in such cases, but more so when they are capable of showing great resilience in their labour.

The women inmates of the farm are representative of the Salvadoran women. As inmates, they also face the difficulties associated with trying to gain skills and knowledge that can lead to improved livelihoods once outside prison walls. It is difficult to gauge whether the prison farm

⁸ For another description of the role of women on the side of the guerrillas see Tommy Sue Montgomery's excellent work on the Salvadoran Civil War, “Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace”, 1995, pp. 123-24.

program can be considered a success at this stage in terms of reintegration. The different role performed by inmates, working outdoors in manual labour, could carry with it a reframing of possible roles once outside prison. At one point, the administrator of the farm stated that there had been no cases of recidivism. I did not feel it necessary to remark on the recentness of the program nor on the fact that inmates in the Farm were from a minority of inmates who had progressed to the semi-liberty and trust phases (only 4% of all inmates are found in either of these stages). It is still too early to define the success of the program by levels of recidivism.

In terms of the work and production of the farm the program had done well in using modest means and adopting basic appropriate practices. As is the case in many correctional systems in the developing world, the prison farm program was limited by budget constraints. As a result, the use of machinery or mechanical tools was negligible. Inputs were at times gifts from other government departments and equipment that seemed necessary, such as a water pump, never materialized. The result of low investments, however, also fit with the requirements of keeping the inmates occupied in agricultural activities. In the future the addition of a tractor or a pump would have the added benefit of more production and the capacity to expand on land use, but for the first phase of the Farm the modest approach was seemingly appropriate. With little knowledge of farming and with a large number of “workers” it made sense to keep things basic. For the future of the Izalco Prison Farm, the empowerment of the inmates through greater initiative-driven activities that could target future livelihoods and investment into much needed equipment could very well allow for the expansion of spaces for transformation, for the institution and for the inmates alike.

Recommendations and Areas for Further Study

There was sufficient awareness and understanding of the functioning of the agricultural work of the farm by the *tutoras*. They interact with everyone in the farm and they do so in a manner which puts them in a privileged position of interaction with prison officials and inmates alike. In the interviews, the tutors described some of the challenges of their work. A marked difficulty is found in their lack of knowledge of agriculture. In this regard they are not at fault, receiving limited instruction from the agronomist; they follow what they might think is correct or what they might have been told before. It would be advisable for the tutors and inmates alike to receive agriculture-based workshops and training. The presence of an agronomist or an extension worker based in the prison would be ideal as well. The tutors are also aware that increasing the amount of training programs related to food preparation and food processing and other activities focused on the women might be more important for the inmates once they gain their freedom.

The prison farm program would benefit from additional research that builds upon this work. The labour and the perceptions of inmates, the evaluation of training practices, a follow up with those inmates who have served their time, the expansion of new training and new initiatives. These and other subjects would serve to create a better picture of the potential impact of a prison farm in a developing country such as El Salvador that faces great challenges in terms of criminal justice and poverty issues. An aspect that would serve to improve future research would be the record keeping of the Farm's statistics. More than a few discrepancies in the production data provided by DGCP officials put in question the accuracy of the production of the Farm. There is a need to better assess the challenges and opportunities associated with agriculture-based labour regimes that are intended to reintegrate inmates, with gender a key aspect to be taken into consideration.

Finally, the DGCP and the Government of El Salvador could do well in adapting the Farm's work to match the realities found outside prison walls. Even when suspending judgement, it is not difficult to have a certain degree of skepticism towards the overtly favorable portrayal of the prison farms by both the Government of El Salvador and Salvadoran media. More than having a prison labour program that can be portrayed as beneficial for society, it is important to create well-planned and diverse programs with options that can have a substantive effect in the long-term futures of inmates, the correctional system, and society alike. In the end, as mentioned earlier in reference to prisons in general, the success of the prison farms' program will be dependent on its flexibility.

APPENDIX A

Copy of email communication between the University of Ottawa's Office of Ethics and Integrity and myself.

Hello Jaime,

Thank you for your email. I've looked over your interview guide and discussed it with our Director, Catherine Paquet. According to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2):

``In some cases, research may involve interaction with individuals who are not themselves the focus of the research in order to obtain information. For example, one may collect information from authorized personnel to release information or data in the ordinary course of their employment about organizations, policies, procedures, professional practices or statistical reports. Such individuals are not considered participants for the purposes of this Policy. This is distinct from situations where individuals are considered participants because they are themselves the focus of the research. For example, individuals who are asked for their personal opinions about organizations, or who are observed in their work setting for the purposes of research, are considered participants.``

In cases like these, ethics approval is not necessary. Your study definitely seems to fall under this definition and therefore would not need ethics approval.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me via email or at extension 5387,

Best regards,

Mélanie Rioux

Ethics Coordinator
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity
University of Ottawa
Tabaret 154
ethics@uottawa.ca

-----Original Message-----

From: ahida083@uottawa.ca [mailto:ahida083@uottawa.ca]

Sent: June 3, 2013 11:08 AM

To: Ethics

Subject: Interview guide re: ethics review

Hi Melanie,

I am attaching a document with the interview guides I will be using for my research. This past Friday afternoon we discussed whether I would require to submit an ethics review form for my research. After we discussed the research in some detail you checked with your colleague and after this you told me that I would most likely not need an ethics review, but that your office would like to see the interview guides for the work.

Just to remind you of the research and our conversation, my research is about prison farms in El Salvador, Central America. The research focuses on the agricultural work and production of a farm,

particularly the operations of the farm. The research is exploratory as the farms have been recently established and does not seek to research on opinions or perceptions of the prison farm work but rather a description of the operations and how the work is being linked with other organizations and entities.

There are three different interview guides in the attached document. The first one is a structured interview of the agricultural production activities of the farm. The second and third interview guides are semi-structured interviews with themes to be discussed with key personnel who work directly in the farming activities and key people who work in organizations or other entities who are linked to the work of the farm.

The original interview samples are in Spanish, but I have added translated versions here. Please let me know if you consider that the interviews show that the research will not require an ethics review and if you need anything else please let me know.

Regards,

Jaime Antonio Hidalgo
ahida083@uottawa.ca

Graduate Student - MA Globalization & International Development School of International Development and Global Studies University of Ottawa----

APPENDIX B

List of countries in Latin America that have prison farms or prison-based agriculture programs, with examples of some of the penitentiaries (non-exhaustive list).

COUNTRY	PENITENTIARIES	NOTES
Argentina	Instituto Penitenciario Federal de Salta, “La Isla”	Argentina has farms in a number of prisons, La Isla, for example, besides a farm, includes an orchard and a floriculture workshop. ⁹
Belize	Belize Central Prison, “Hattieville”	Hattieville is Belize’s sole correctional facility; The prison is not a farm but the work program includes agriculture as a rehabilitation tool. ¹⁰
Bolivia	Centro Nueva Vida Santa Cruz, “Cenvicruz”	Cenvicruz is a correctional facility for youth. Established in the grounds of a former farm, includes farmland, milk cows and chickens.
Brazil	Colonia Penal Agricola do Paraná, “Piraquara”	Piraquara, established as a prison farm in 1941, was created after a 1940 Corrections Conference decreed to create prison farms. ¹¹
Chile	Centro de Educacion y Trabajo (CET) Semi-Abierto Vilcun	Chile has a number of CET’s that include agriculture components as part of its joint work-labour program. ¹²
Colombia	Establecimiento Penitenciario y Carcelario de Silvia, Cauca	The EPMS Silvia focuses on agriculture for rehabilitation as it has adapted to the high percentage of rural inmates from the local indigenous population. ¹³
Costa Rica	Centro de Atención Semi Institucional Cartago	Costa Rica has a number of semi-open facilities that include agriculture
Ecuador	Esmeraldas / Centros de Rehabilitación Social	Ecuador has Centers for Social Rehabilitation where inmates can learn/work in pig and poultry farming, horticulture and aquaculture.
El Salvador	Granja Penal Izalco	See Case Study
Guatemala	Granja Penal Cantel	Guatemala has a number of <i>Granjas Penales</i> , Prison Farms, though not all of these “farms” include agriculture.
Haiti	*Facilities not specified	Chosen Ministry, a Christian NGO that primarily focuses on women’s agriculture, provides

⁹ Source: http://www.spf.gov.ar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=180:cpf-i&catid=36:provincia-de-salta&Itemid=282

¹⁰ Source: <http://kolbe.bz/industry/>

¹¹ Source: <http://www.depen.pr.gov.br/modules/conteudo/conteudo.php?conteudo=27>

¹² Source: <http://www.gendarmeria.gob.cl/>

¹³ Source :

<http://www.inpec.gov.co/portal/page/portal/Inpec/ElInpecComoInstitucion/EstablecimientosPenitenciarios/Establecimientos%20Regional%20Occidente/EPMS%20SILVIA>

Honduras	Granja Penal de Comayagua	training and funding of inmates in agriculture. Honduras, under its “Una Segunda Oportunidad” rehabilitation program, has agriculture training. ¹⁴
Mexico	Colonia Penal Federal Islas Marias	Established as a penal colony in 1905, “Islas Marias” is a secluded open prison. Mexico has also begun to create “green prisons” that include urban agriculture programs.
Nicaragua	Centro de Tipitapa	Currently in the planning stage, Tipitapa will house approximately 200 inmates in a semi-open prison farm.
Paraguay	Granja Ita Pora	Paraguay has productive labour initiatives for rehabilitation that include agriculture in prison farms. ¹⁵
Panama	Centro Femenino de Rehabilitación, Doña Cecilia Orillac de Chiari	The all-women’s Centro Orillac includes training options in horticulture, staple crops and poultry farming. Panama has several facilities that include agricultural labour. ¹⁶
Peru	*Facilities not specified	Has prisons where agriculture is included as part of rehabilitation programs.
Uruguay	Granja Penal Nº 9 “Colonia El Potrero”	“El Potrero”, a recently created facility, is part of an attempt to shift correctional facilities towards prison farms.
Venezuela	Penitenciaría General de Venezuela (PGV)	Venezuela has a dedicated institute that administers prison labour. The Instituto Autonomo Caja de Trabajo Penitenciario oversees the work of close to 5,000 prisoners, including agricultural labour programs. ¹⁷

¹⁴ Source: http://www.oas.org/juridico/spanish/gapeco_sp_docs_hnd9.pdf

¹⁵ Source: <http://www.mjt.gov.py/interna.php?id=305&sec=noticias>

¹⁶ Source: <http://mingob.gob.pa/contenido/centro-femenino-de-rehabilitaci-n-do-cecilia-orillac-de-chiari>

¹⁷ Source: <http://iactp.gob.ve>

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